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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. US Midterm Elections
- [1](#)2. Beit Hanun Attack
- [1](#)3. Mideast
- [1](#)4. Syria

Key stories in the media:

Please note: block quotes only, Thursday, November 9, 2006.

[1](#)1. US Post Midterm Elections:

Summary:

Senior military analyst Ze'ev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "It is quite doubtful that the Democrats would have decided on an immediate withdrawal from Iraq had the decision been up to them. They, too, understand that a rushed pullout could end up having the U.S. lose the entire Middle East. The Democrats will continue to make it difficult for Bush and criticize him for the war in Iraq, but they will find a way to finance the army's continued presence there without humiliating the U.S."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The Democrats must resist the temptation to dedicate their new found power to the sole purpose of bringing down their nemesis, George Bush. They will be more successful politically if they do what is best for their country and the world, and join together to confront the terrorist tyrants that threaten us all."

Block Quotes:

[1](#)I. "U.S. Won't Quit Iraq Just Yet"

Senior military analyst Ze'ev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/9): "Does the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld as U.S. Secretary of Defense, who led the war in Iraq, signal an immediate beginning of the American army's withdrawal from Iraq? The answer is no. It is more reasonable to conclude that the appointment of Robert Gates to the position will represent the start of changes in the way American forces are deployed in Iraq and the establishment of a plan with the Iraqi government for taking on greater military responsibility. It is more reasonable that following its loss in Congress and a call by many voters for a change in military policy in Iraq, the Republican Party will now focus on an effort to save the White House for U.S. President George [1](#)W. Bush's political heir. In other words, the party wants to show that it will be making changes in Iraq, while taking national security responsibility for the United States' position as a world power. It is quite doubtful that the Democrats would have decided on an immediate withdrawal from Iraq had the decision been up to them. They, too, understand that a rushed pullout could end up having the U.S. lose the entire Middle East. The Democrats will continue to make it difficult for Bush and criticize him for the war in Iraq, but they will find a way to finance the army's continued presence there without humiliating the U.S."

II. "Confront Iran Together"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (11/9): "The call for unity and cooperation just after a hard-fought election is as American as motherhood and apple pie. For all our sakes, however, this pledge had better not be mere boilerplate. Speaking from a particularly precarious part of the world, we simply cannot afford a United States that, in the midst of global war, becomes paralyzed by partisan bickering. Though there is a long history of midterm elections of second-term presidents being treacherous for the party in power, it is clear that President George Bush and, in particular, the war in Iraq, cost the Republicans dearly.... The real problem ... is not the shallow and unconstructive debate over Iraq, but that Democrats and Republicans have allowed Iraq to become a distraction from the main threat looming, that of a nuclear Iran.... What the US needs, instead, is a bipartisan strategy for victory.... As it happens, a successful policy toward Iran is critical to winning in Iraq, since it is almost impossible to imagine democracy prevailing in Iraq so long as Iran is increasingly able to support terrorism there, eventually under the protection of a nuclear umbrella.... The best way for Democrats to prove that they should be given the chance to govern is for them to work shoulder-to-shoulder with Bush on foreign policy in the two critical years ahead. The sight of Bush and Pelosi reaching agreement on Iran policy would itself send a powerful message to Europe that America is not willing to live with a nuclear Iran, and would embolden these nations to toughen their own policies. As unlikely as this positive scenario may seem to be, the alternative to it is frightening, and would be disastrous for America and the world. A divided America following a feckless Europe is a recipe for deterioration across the board, including defeat in Iraq and the emboldening of the radical axis that emerged in the recent Lebanon war: Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas. The Democrats must resist the temptation to dedicate their new found power to the sole purpose of bringing down their nemesis, George Bush. They will be more successful politically if they do what is best for their country and the world, and join together to confront the terrorist tyrants that threaten us all."

12. Beit Hanun Attack:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The cannons must be replaced with calls for dialogue, the economic boycott must be replaced with an opening of the taps, and the cruel siege of Gaza must be replaced with a supervised opening of the border crossings. Only in this way can we perhaps change the dangerous atmosphere that now prevails, and even more so following the bloodbath in Beit Hanun. The responsibility for this rests entirely on the prime minister's shoulders."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "They [the Palestinians] are not attacking the 1967 borders; they are attacking the 1948 lines. They are not challenging the occupation, and they are not arguing with the oppression. They want to uproot us from here, wipe us from the face of the earth.... All they have to do to get quiet is to stop shooting. Until then, there will be no quiet, and sometimes, there will be mishaps."

Political affairs correspondent Sima Kadmon wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "This is indeed, a calibration problem. But this is a problem not just of the artillery battery, but of us, all of us. Of a government that for such a long time has found no way to talk to the other side. Of the IDF, that time after time manages to get us into trouble in mishaps that should not happen. Of a state that closes its eyes and seals its heart to what is happening a few dozen kilometers away. Of the Palestinians, who display negligence and have not managed to vomit from their midst the radical elements. And of an indifferent world that does nothing to stop what is happening."

Middle East affairs commentator, Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Despite the promised disengagement, Gaza still remains an Israeli matter, and the world is watching from the bleachers, on the television screens. It's time that weary Israel should sit on the bleachers and watch as the world takes charge over

Gaza. Those who criticize Israel in the Western world should also be prepared to act, and the moment has come."

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "For our own sake, we must know what really happened yesterday in Beit Hanoun. We must, because our hearts have become inured. Ten killed here, 60 killed there, yesterday another 18, some of them innocent civilians. For us, this passes as if it were nothing. We have to ask ourselves: does this truly have to be?"

Senior op-ed columnist Eitan Haber wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "It is terrible [What happened in Beit Hanun]. And we have to try not to use the excuse, 'but we are at war.' Because if, God forbid, such sights continue, we will perhaps beat Hamas, but we will lose the world's support."

Senior military analyst Ze'ev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Instead of talking, Israel has become an observer that deploys artillery. For months, Israel has avoided negotiations with Mahmoud Abbas. By doing so, Israeli is strengthening Palestinian extremists, and what is happening in the Gaza Strip is adding fuel to the bonfire."

Block Quotes:

I. "A Cease-Fire in Gaza (2)"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (11/9): "Yesterday, we wrote here that 'Israel should declare a complete cease-fire in the Gaza Strip for a predetermined period, during which it will not engage in any violent actions, neither assassinations nor incursions. Simultaneously, it should call on the Palestinians to hold their fire as well.' What we feared has come to pass -- and for the Palestinians, even worse: At least 19 Palestinians were killed yesterday during a sustained Israel Defense Forces artillery attack on the town of Beit Hanun.... No excuse can justify this atrocity.... It is no longer enough to express regret; it is also necessary to draw conclusions. It has now become conclusively clear that the campaign against the Qassam rocket launchers in Gaza can no longer be entrusted solely to the IDF.... That operation [Autumn Clouds] sowed only death and destruction, without bringing an end to the Qassam fire. On the contrary, it only increased it.... The prime minister, as the person who bears overall responsibility, must order the IDF to halt the fire on Gaza -- immediately, in all cases and with every type of weapon. If Israel does not want to find itself embroiled soon in a new bloodbath, including suicide bombings in its cities, it must launch a dramatic, unequivocal move, as only such a move might prevent the outbreak of a new intifada.... The cannons must be replaced with calls for dialogue, the economic boycott must be replaced with an opening of the taps, and the cruel siege of Gaza must be replaced with a supervised opening of the border crossings. Only in this way can we perhaps change the dangerous atmosphere that now prevails, and even more so following the bloodbath in Beit Hanun. The responsibility for this rests entirely on the prime minister's shoulders."

II. "The Price of the Kassam Rockets"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (11/9): "Somebody needs to tell the truth, to the inhabitants of Beit Hanoun, to the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, to the Arabs of the territories, to the whole world. It is a simple, harsh and single truth: those who fire thousands of Kassam rockets upon a civilian population for years, those who accumulate tons of explosive materials, arms and Katyusha rockets for months, those who impose terrorism and fear upon an entire region for no apparent reason need to understand that they cannot hide behind women and children. Such behavior carries a price tag. Every country in the world has an obligation to protect its citizens. Israel's behavior in Gaza has been much more moderate, humane and moral than the way American, British or Russian armies would respond to terrorists who consistently fired on Texas, Coventry or Moscow.... The truth is that until they stop firing Kassam rockets upon Israel, Israel must keep firing back. Yes, firing back. They shoot to kill women and children. We do not. Never. But when they shoot at us from inside inhabited areas, it is very difficult to prevent mishaps or terrible

incidents.... Every other method has been tried, and failed. With scoundrels you behave like a scoundrel, and with murderous, bloodthirsty terrorism that wants to wipe you off the map, you have to respond accordingly: wipe it out.... We expected that they would sit quietly after we left Gaza.... Yes, in our naiveté we expected that now, at least in Gaza, 'they would sit quietly.' Instead of that, we got intensified barrages of upgraded Kassam rockets, tons of explosives and Hamas in power.... They [the Palestinians] could have proven to the world that when Israel leaves, withdraws and recognizes the international border, a solution is accomplished and calm achieved. They could have given us a reason to leave the West Bank as well. But instead, they fell upon us with wild rage. They are not attacking the 1967 borders; they are attacking the 1948 lines. They are not challenging the occupation, and they are not arguing with the oppression. They want to uproot us from here, wipe us from the face of the earth.... All they have to do to get quiet is to stop shooting. Until then, there will be no quiet, and sometimes, there will be mishaps."

III. "Not Calibrated"

Political affairs correspondent Sima Kadmon wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/9): "A calibration problem, the OC Southern Command yesterday explained the killing in Beit Hanoun. Indeed, a calibration problem. But not just of the artillery battery. But of us, all of us. Of a government that for such a long time has found no way to talk to the other side. Of the IDF, that time after time manages to get us into trouble in mishaps that should not happen. Of a state that closes its eyes and seals its heart to what is happening a few dozen kilometers away. Of the Palestinians, who display negligence and have not managed to vomit from their midst the radical elements. And of an indifferent world that does nothing to stop what is happening.... A regrettable mistake, politicians and army people in the past and present said yesterday. This was not a mistake. This was a disaster. It's a regrettable mistake when you step on someone's toe, not when you kill 11 members of one family.... This is not even one stray shell that was mistakenly discharged. More than ten shells were fired from this artillery battery.... Somebody has to stop this madness. Somebody has to stop for a moment and think.... The Kassam rocket fire will not stop, every child in Sderot knows this. Just as every child in Beit Hanoun knows that we will never go away. The question is when we will begin to talk. Because ... there must be consensus on one thing: that there is nothing -- neither for us nor for them -- to lose by this."

IV. "A Moment before the Next War"

Middle East affairs commentator, Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/9): "Yesterday's tragedy in Gaza, and in recent years in Sderot, makes it clear that the Israelis and the Palestinians can no longer be left on their own. The rise of fanatic political Islam in the territories has made any political solution, or even a partition, impossible. It has already been proven that every time Israel evacuates territory, whether in Lebanon or in the Palestinian Authority, the territory is immediately seized by terror. This is violent, destructive terror that has no limits, that will not hesitate to do all it can to attack us. From this aspect, there is no choice but to admit that even an orderly handover of the area to the Palestinians, such as in the Oslo process, or even abandoning it, such as in disengagement, have not proven themselves.... It seems that the Palestinians themselves are planning a large-scale military action against Israeli cities, and this can be expected in about half a year, after the tons of ammunition that they are storing in the Gaza Strip turn into a critical mass of rockets, which are smuggled from Egypt.... After this war, the world will enter the picture, just as it did in southern Lebanon, and will send a strong enforcement force to Gaza, like UNIFIL.... On second thought, and in light of yesterday's serious incident, why should such an international force not go in now already, and so prevent the war that assessments say can be expected in the spring?.... The Gaza Strip will be given over to the world's responsibility, military and humanitarily.... The Palestinians themselves will become an international problem, and will thereby be very limited in continuing to fire at Israel.... What happens inside the Gaza Strip -- whether its residents achieve independence one day and how it will be run -- will be under the

responsibility of the world, which now condemns Israel.... Despite the promised disengagement, Gaza still remains an Israeli matter, and the world is watching from the bleachers, on the television screens. It's time that weary Israel should sit on the bleachers and watch as the world takes charge over Gaza. Those who criticize Israel in the Western world should also be prepared to act, and the moment has come."

IV. "The Mystery of the Shells"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/9): "Anyone who couldn't sleep yesterday because they were worried about the damage to the State of Israel's good reputation can stop worrying. It has been a long time since we had such a reputation. Israel is viewed by the world as having a light trigger finger when it comes to civilians. Whether this is true or not -- this is a fact.... For our own sake, we must know what really happened yesterday in Beit Hanoun. We must, because our hearts have become inured. Ten killed here, 60 killed there, yesterday another 18, some of them innocent civilians. For us, this passes as if it were nothing. We have to ask ourselves: does this truly have to be? Does this really serve our national interests? We deserve to know if it is really just bad luck that pursues us, or if this bad luck is, in fact, inherent in the system.

Those who play with artillery near a dense urban area -- even if they take into account all the safety ranges, orders and procedures -- should expect disasters. Something unexpected and unplanned is always liable to happen. That is inherent in this game."

VI. "Blood and Tears"

Senior op-ed columnist Eitan Haber wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (11/9): "The IDF made a serious mistake yesterday, and not for the first time. The sights from Gaza were harsh and bitter and it is impossible and we must not remain indifferent to the ripped bodies of children. The IDF must -- damn it, how is this done -- be careful and cautious and strict so that such blood curling mistakes do not happen, but it is important to remember that only the clumsiness of the Hamas in Gaza -- thank God -- prevents us from seeing similar sights, almost every day, in Sderot, for example. It is terrible. And we have to try not to use the excuse, 'but we are at war.' Because if, God forbid, such sights continue, we will perhaps beat Hamas, but we will lose the world's support."

VII. "A Military Failure and Strategic Vacuum"

Senior military analyst Ze'ev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/9): "The severe incident in Beit Hanun in the Gaza Strip has again dragged the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a gloomy crossroad from both a tactical and strategic perspective.... In principle, it is correct to argue that the Beit Hanun affair did not begin there; it was preceded by four Qassam rockets that landed in the heart of Ashkelon the previous day. Two other rockets were fired at Sderot yesterday morning. No country would remain indifferent to rocket fire on its cities. The only problem is the lack of proportionality regarding Israel's response.... Indeed, even in a clear case of self-defense, the killing of many innocent civilians, and especially children, is intolerable. Israel is not engaged in all-out war with the Palestinians.... Just as Israel is not placing a total blockade on the Gaza Strip, it should also refrain from expanding the number of civilians injured while confronting Palestinian terror.... From a military perspective, it must be acknowledged that the IDF has in fact failed in its war against the Qassam rockets.... Sadly, the IDF today is not providing the requisite security to Israel's citizens.... Israel finds itself in a dire strategic situation, but there are some openings. The bad thing is that Israel has been thrust into a dangerous political-strategic vacuum. It faces four extremist entities: Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. With regard to two of them, Iran and Hezbollah, there is not even a tiny opening for negotiations and an accord. Israel itself placed the other two, Syria and Hamas, in a political-strategic vacuum. Syria, which is ready to recognize Israel, is being told that there's nothing to talk about. Hamas, which does not want to recognize Israel and previous agreements with Israel, has been isolated by the international community. Instead of talking, Israel has become an

observer that deploys artillery. For months, Israel has avoided negotiations with Mahmoud Abbas. By doing so, Israeli is strengthening Palestinian extremists, and what is happening in the Gaza Strip is adding fuel to the bonfire."

13. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Next week, Olmert will hear from George Bush about the American administration's aspirations for the two remaining years of the president's term, and whether he will invest efforts in Middle East diplomacy. An understanding of the American position is vital for the prime minister's situation assessment; but upon his return from Washington, Olmert will have to explain to the public where we go from here."

Block Quotes:

"Olmert in Autumn"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/9): "The results of Friday's Haaretz survey indicate a growing and worrisome rift between Israel's citizens and the political system that is supposed to represent them. The prime minister and defense minister have lost the public's confidence.... One can say that the distaste for the government of Ehud Olmert and Amir Peretz stems not only from the results of the war in Lebanon, but also from a lack of hope for the future. In the autumn of his rule, Olmert is fulfilling what he promised: 'to manage the country without an agenda.'.... He [Olmert] still believes in evacuating settlements from the West Bank and demarcating a new border on the hills. But his hasty abandonment of the convergence plan left him without anything. The diplomatic channels are blocked.... Now the time has come for Olmert to find himself a direction.... In his recent speeches, Olmert has raised several banners: establishing a constitution, revising the system of government, rehabilitating the North, signing an accord with the Palestinians, exercising deployment vis-a-vis Iran, making peace with Lebanon, confronting the struggle against Hamas, tackling poverty. All of them are fine and worthy objectives, but now he must choose. A prime minister generally has one opportunity in each term to set a central goal and work to advance it. It is impossible to march on five parallel paths. Next week, Olmert will hear from George Bush about the American administration's aspirations for the two remaining years of the president's term, and whether he will invest efforts in Middle East diplomacy. An understanding of the American position is vital for the prime minister's situation assessment; but upon his return from Washington, Olmert will have to explain to the public where we go from here."

14. Syria:

Summary:

Columnist Larry Derfner wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The Syrian regime is secular; its alliances with Hizbullah and Iran grow out of political convenience, not ideology; it has kept the cease-fire on the Golan for three decades; it has talked to Israel before and is seemingly eager to do so again. Maybe it's a bluff. Maybe negotiations would fail like they did the first time. But with the IDF predicting war with Syria next summer, what do we have to lose? Nothing but our despair."

Block Quotes:

"Talk to Syria"

Columnist Larry Derfner wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (11/9): "If for no other reason than the Israeli people's psychological well-being, the Olmert government has to accept

Syria's offer to begin peace negotiations. Since the summer war in Lebanon, Israelis have gone into a serious, dangerous depression, and it's only getting deeper.... Israelis have resigned themselves to a life of war and a future of war.... The only options left, most Israelis are now convinced, is fight or flight, and since very few of us are about to flee the country, that leaves only fight -- here, there, wherever.... NOW HERE comes Syrian President Bashar Assad and, only a few days ago, Foreign Minister Walid Muallem to urge Israel to talk peace -- and Ehud Olmert says no.... The real reason Olmert won't talk is because the Bush administration won't let him, something the administration hasn't even tried to hide. As far as Bush is concerned, Syria is an auxiliary member of the axis of evil, and you don't talk to them.... This strategy has worked about as well with Syria as it has with Iran and North Korea, and about as well as the crusade for democracy has worked in Iraq. It may be about to change. Between the congressional election results and the exit strategy from Iraq being devised by the forceful diplomat James Baker, Bush could decide that on second thought, maybe Israel and Syria ought to sit down and try to settle their differences.... WHAT WOULD Olmert say to that? He'd say, 'Yes, sir.'.... And then masses of Israelis who once hoped for such an agreement, but who have since soured on the possibility of peace with Syria or anybody else in the Middle East, would start to hope again.... The Syrian regime is secular; its alliances with Hizbullah and Iran grow out of political convenience, not ideology; it has kept the cease-fire on the Golan for three decades; it has talked to Israel before and is seemingly eager to do so again. Maybe it's a bluff. Maybe negotiations would fail like they did the first time. But with the IDF predicting war with Syria next summer, what do we have to lose? Nothing but our despair."

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